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Vaishali Hamlai's *Mind Trap*: Celebration of the "Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind"

Abstract: Vaishali Hamlai's *Mind Trap* showcases intricacies of human mind at war with the see-saw of life itself. The novel is concerned with a young girl's apprenticeship to life. It gives the author an opportunity to air her views on various problems that confront human mind in the confusion and haphazards of life. Minds are queer stuff, and one has to know how to manage them. How Kainaat, the protagonist of this piece, acts as healer to manage human minds for the wellbeing of others, has been the major thematic motif of the novel.

The title of a work of art adumbrates the theme of it. It gives that particular work of art a special identity. Vaishali Hamlai's *Mind Trap* showcases intricacies of human mind at war with the see-saw of life itself. The novel is concerned with a young girl's apprenticeship to life. It gives the author an opportunity to air her views on various problems that confront human mind in the confusion and haphazards of life. Minds are queer stuff, and one has to know how to manage them. How Kainaat, the protagonist of this piece, acts as healer to manage human minds for the wellbeing of others, has been the major thematic motif of the novel.

With her dramatist's precision and economy and novelist's realism and restraint, Hamlai conjures up in the opening pages of the book a vision of Kainaat's growing up under the tutelage of her mom. The latter's "energy was so strong that Kainaat would automatically get positively influenced with her presence". (MT 13) Her mom teaches her how to develop

integrity, trust and righteousness as her cardinal virtues. Mom's way of teaching somewhat echoes Robert Browning's poetic credo of "we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better/Sleep to wake" (1007):

"It was important for Kainaat to go through disappointments and have her share of failures earlier in life, rather than later in life. She had to rise above her disappointments and overcome her failures."(MT 14)

Emotions are not only about movement, they are also about attachments or about what connects us to this or that. What moves us, what makes us feel, is what holds us in life. At the outset, Kainaat gets emotionally moved and attached to her childhood buddy, Narayani and her cousin Arjun. Unable to withstand his beloved's rejection, Arjun takes an overdose of drug, and is found unconscious in his room. Since Arjun hates to lose, he revenges himself on life by spurning it as a cheat. Love, as Kainaat envisages it, is the self-manifestation of the absolute that both deludes and depersonalizes the possessed lover. She starts critiquing it in a fashion that simultaneously educates and heals Arjun's emotional wounds:

"You have such a big ego that you couldn't handle rejection. You didn't do drugs because you were sad; you did it because your ego was hurt and the thought of anyone rejecting you."(MT 29)

Being the perfect motivation in each other's life, Kainaat and Narayani complete and complement each other. Their attitude towards falling in love obeys one "golden rule": "Never pursue any man, because they thought, the moment you pursue them they stop following you". (MT 6) Whereas Kainaat becomes an obsession for Nikki, her company owner's son, the latter has "infected her whole body, her soul to be precise". This transmutes her erstwhile antipodal attitude into a flaming passion that burns up all her existence. As Somerset Maugham argues:

“Love is absorbing; it takes the lover out of himself...It makes a man a little more than himself, and at the same time a little less. He ceases to be himself. He is no longer an individual, but a thing, an instrument to some purpose foreign to his ego.”(MS 112)

Hamlai dwells elaborately on this relationship to highlight love’s all-absorbing capacity to turn the mind upside down. There is in love a sense of weakness, a desire to protect, a desire to do good and to give pleasure:

“He (Nikki) was becoming Kainaat’s weakness and Kainaat was melting in him. And the most amazing part was that she didn’t feel threatened in surrendering herself to him. Instead it empowered her.”(MT 65)

For Nikki, marriage is a societal pressure which always demands proof of love and commitment towards each other. “Those in true love and real commitment don’t need any societal pressure to remind them to be faithful.”(MT 99)

Hamlai’s book on Kainaat is as much if not more about her friend Narayani. To write it about one to talk about the other has been her trademark in the narrative design. Kainaat is so elated seeing the romance of Arjun and Narayani that she wonders how a lady can exhibit so many emotions at one single moment. But as ill-luck would have it, Arjun’s loss of job and his mother’s constant battering to take him to a psychiatrist make him hysterical once again. But Narayani as well as Kainaat believe in the therapy of strengthening his mind first. Arjun should muster the art of believing in himself. His mind is trapping him to believe that he is a failure. He needs to help himself.

Kainaat’s taking refuge to London and its aftermath form the crux of the rest part of *Mind Trap*. As she suffers from guilty conscience due her escapade, Kainaat further refines her capacity to substitute sweet memory as an armour against life’s sting for bitter reality. Narayani’s surprising visit to London with her daughter Jaan fills Kainaat’s sense of void in London. Her childhood buddy ignites in her both the art of mothering a kid and the desire for

having a baby. Arrivals of both her mom and Nikki's dad complete Kainaat's family in the true sense. The subplot—the progressive elucidation of Tamannah's hazardous life—adds to the suspense of the book. Hamlai interweaves it with Kainaat's so as to reiterate the latter's innate desire to help others, and establish thereby the 'placebo' effect of mind—the ability to heal ourselves by our own powerful thoughts. This is in tune with Sara Ahmed's view in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*:

“Emotions may involve ‘being moved’ for some precisely by fixing others as having certain characteristics. The circulation of objects of emotion involves the transformation of others...”(54)

Nothing can despoil the happiness of a mind since “The mind is its own place and in itself /Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n”. (PL 38)

Apart from its take on enigmatic and elusive human mind, Vaishali Hamlai's *Mind Trap* uses aphoristic style of writing to achieve a didactic undertone. Many sentences of the book may easily pass for proverbial sayings. Further, sharing with the characters their ontological status, Hamlai relates to them with a kind of ease and intimacy that conduces to her narrative's lifelikeness. It contributes to make it worthy not only “to be read wholly” but to be “digested” as well.

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